

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LIMA 002187

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR INL, WHA/AND, DS/DSS/ITA, DS/IP/WHA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR ASEC PGOV PINS PE

SUBJECT: KILLINGS AND KIDNAPPINGS BY INDIGENOUS GROUP

APPARENTLY NOT CONNECTED TO OPIUM TRADE

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: The murder of four health workers followed by the kidnapping of a journalist and his assistant by indigenous Aguaruna tribesmen sparked speculation that these incidents were linked to efforts to cover up local opium cultivation and trafficking. An ongoing police investigation, however, indicates that this is not/not the case. The two hostages were released on 5/10, after a high-level GOP team agreed to consider Aguaruna requests for health, education, and communication infrastructure assistance. The Aguaruna agreed to cooperate with the police investigation and denied that opium was being cultivated in the area, inviting the authorities to overfly the area. A U.S. AT-65 plane conducting reconnaissance for possible opium poppy fields temporarily suspended operations in the area during the hostage crisis, but we intend to resume flights there soon. End Summary.

12. (U) On 5/6 a group of Aguarunas, an indigenous people, took a journalist and his assistant hostage in Pampa Entsa in the province of Condorcanqui, Amazonas Department. A high-level Technical Commission composed of Ministry of Interior representatives and police met with Aguaruna leadership on 5/10 and successfully negotiated the release of the two hostages. The Aguaruna leaders agreed to cooperate with the police investigation into the killing of four GOP health workers in late April, and invited the authorities to fly around the site of the murders (Tagkijap) to confirm Aguaruna claims that there are no/no opium poppy fields in the area. The Aguaruna leadership also requested that the GOP construct health and education centers and roads in the communities and install community telephones, radios, and solar panels. The Commission agreed to bring these requests back to the appropriate government agencies.

13. (U) On 5/3 a search party in Numpatkain discovered the four bodies of a Ministry of Health team which had been missing since 4/20. The team had been providing medical assistance to Aguaruna communities. Press reports indicate that three of the four had been killed by shots to the head, while the fourth had been beaten to death, but our police sources have not yet confirmed this report. On 5/5 the Organization of Indigenous People of the Northern Amazon Region of Peru released a statement claiming that inebriated Aguaruna tribesmen in the community of Tagkijap had murdered the health team. The statement explained that some women in the community had complained that the victims obliged them to disrobe in public for examinations and that the tribesmen, who had been celebrating Mitayo, a traditional festival, responded with a drunken rampage.

14. (SBU) Some press and local leaders, however, speculated that the deaths were related to narcotrafficking as they believe there is significant opium poppy cultivation and trafficking in the area. National Police and Public Ministry authorities are investigating the murders; the latest information we have received indicates that the authorities believe that the murders were not/not narco-related.

15. (SBU) According to conversations with contacts familiar with the program, the health workers were unlikely to behave in a grossly insensitive manner since they were trained and at least two of the four were experienced in the communities. The health worker program (ELITE) has been in place since 1998 with no other fatal incidents. One year ago, another ELITE group was denied access to an Aguaruna community because the community feared the health workers were police. According to sources, one month prior to the murders, Aguarunas in the community believed that police were looking for opium poppy around their community.

16. (SBU) A U.S. AT-65 plane conducting reconnaissance for possible opium poppy fields in the area temporarily suspended operations in the region, pending resolution of the Aguaruna situation. The plane was deployed to the Tingo Maria area to continue reconnaissance in the meantime.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Intelligence gathered from local authorities and the police points to large-scale opium poppy

cultivation and a surge in violent crime in the area in question, especially around the town of Jaen. While the Aguaruna have not/not been previously linked to the opium trade, it is certainly possible that they have reached an understanding with traffickers. Most Aguaruna are monolingual and have limited contact with the outside world, but bilingual members of the community could act as go-betweens. The Aguaruna lands are remote and largely off-limits to COP officials, making them potentially attractive to opium poppy growers and traffickers. END COMMENT.

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